Non-Formal Education for the Inclusion of Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Italy

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Abstract: The number of unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) that landed in Italy on a daily basis was 14,044 in 2022 and 18,820 in 2023 (as stated by the Italian Ministry of Interior). This research study examines Law 47/2017, which implements the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It ponders inclusive educational models other than formal learning by investigating non-formal education (NFE) that takes place outside formal learning settings, although in synergy with them, for personal and vocational fulfilment. By way of example, a particularly original case study on school children newly arrived in Italy from Ukraine in 2022 is reported herein. Thirty interviews were held in Italy for three years, from 2021 to 2023, with the people in charge of unaccompanied migrant children to investigate the integration actions implemented as well as the use of NFE. Novel data from the education and employment sectors were collected to fill some pre-existing gaps in the literature. The focus group conducted in 2023 with twelve volunteer tutors highlighted data and conclusions that can be cross-checked and generalised on the use of effective operating tools to identify European pathways to peace and democracy, which may be useful in forging new solidarity patterns.

Keywords: unaccompanied migrant children; citizenship; inclusion measures; non-formal education

1. Introduction

Migration flows within and outside the European Union (EU) have reshaped our societies all the way to our current identity. In the last five years (2019–2024), a significantly increased number of unaccompanied children have travelled across the Mediterranean Sea to Greece, Spain, and Italy due to their difficult human and economic conditions and a series of geopolitical changes, including complex scenarios such as the current war between Russia and Ukraine and other conflicts.

Our research study on unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) focused on investigating the conditions of their reception, their life prospects, and plans in Italy by gathering the valuable views of as many practitioners and caregivers as possible on the basis of their specific skills.

UMCs are defined as "unaccompanied migrant children within the boundaries of the Italian State, who are not EU nationals, who are in Italy for a reason or are otherwise subject to Italian jurisdiction, unattended by their parents or other adults legally responsible for them according to the laws in force in the Italian legal system" (Law No. 47 of 2017, Article 2) [1].

In Italy, Law No. 47 of 2017 [1] marked an important turning point because UMCs were recognised as holders of all the rights enshrined in the 1989 New York Convention on the Rights of the Child [2], ratified, and enforced in Italy by Law No. 176 of 1991 [3].

The theory of Situated Cognition [4] (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989, pp. 32–42), according to which people's knowledge is embedded in the activity, context, and culture in which it is learned, has inspired the considerations of the situations observed. "Situated

learning" can have a significant impact on how education is designed and implemented; it can help create more engaging and meaningful learning environments for school students and for beneficiaries hosted by SAIs (networks of entities that provide reception and integration services for migrants) [5]. It has been useful to expand on the theory of situated learning, linked to Vygotsky's notion of learning through social development: he argues that society plays a central role in the process of meaning-making [6].

The data findings on the increased use of non-formal education underlined its added value in resolving some conflicts in terms of cooperation between peers. This improvement was noticed both within educational institutions and in the support network for UMC, which involves other local community actors as well as volunteer tutors.

2. Methods and Tools

The work focused on care and reception approaches, good educational practice, and the effective use of inclusion measures in the local educational communities where UMCs are placed. These communities gave us permission to access their facilities, selected the interview dates, and respondents who, in turn, gave their consent to voice recordings and data collection. Quantitative data were collected from governmental site statistics. Qualitative data came from a case study on the placement of Ukrainian UMC in a secondary school; a focus group involving twelve volunteer tutors in charge of UMC, recruited from five Italian regions by Associazione Obiettivo Fanciullo ODV using Snowball sampling, with a view to then sharing the findings with the national network of tutors; the gathering and analysis of thirty semi-structured interviews over three years (2021–2024) with experts, practitioners, professionals, managers, teachers, educators, and cultural mediators in charge of UMC, divided into four groups as described below.

(Group 1) formal education/target group: school managers and secondary education teachers (5 interviews). (Group 2) non-formal education/target group: practitioners and professionals working with and for UMC (15 interviews). (Group 3) target group: experts and professionals working with UMC (5 interviews). (Group 4) other professionals (5 interviews).

The tools used to build the interview guide are based on the research carried out as part of the FAMI Master's Degree Course in "Organisation and Management of Educational Institutions in Multicultural Contexts" for school leaders and technical managers, run by the University of Florence and funded by FAMI (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, 2014–2020). The course was launched during the 2020–2021 academic year with the aim of developing a dashboard of indicators for the integration of unaccompanied minors in schools. The tool, designed for school leaders, consists of a descriptive fact sheet, an impact assessment, and the implementation of an educational project in multicultural contexts.

The originality of this research, on the other hand, lies in the intention to extend similar questions to practitioners who care for unaccompanied minors in out-of-school settings in order to investigate whether non-formal education is used as an inclusive educational methodology in second-level reception systems in Italy to implement integration projects and life plans for UMCs after they reach adulthood.

For the tabulation of the semi-structured interviews, the transcribed data were analysed using the MAXQDA24.4.0 software coding system to produce graphs and charts on the useful indicators of the survey. The data were, therefore, coded and treated in an anonymous and aggregate form.

(a) **Non-formal education and learning processes for UMC in a school context**

Non-formal education in extracurricular contexts is practiced in Italy at present and has been in use in Europe for over thirty years. The Italian education and training systems are centred on formal learning processes, thus running the risk of not valuing—or indeed explicitly neglecting—the broader range of learning modes that do not take place in educational and training institutions. Non-formal education has been recognised as very useful for the inclusion of all learners, including those with disabilities and migrant backgrounds. The most commonly used methods are cooperative learning, active participation, pedagogy, and the Theatre of the Oppressed to address educational problems and school dropout.

The process of UMC inclusion presents strong criticalities due to the consequences of their terrible journey—especially among young teenagers. The fears and hopes of leaving their homeland, the uncertainty about their hosting, violence, and abuse become great risks for them and a source of responsibility to face for the countries of arrival. Unfortunately, these dire situations have ancient roots, as explained by Edgard Morin [7] (2000, pp. 58–59):

> The adventure of life is in itself a conflicting story, marked by disasters that cause mass annihilations among species and the emergence of new ones through lack and suffering.

> [...] Often, our misfortune is also our grace, our privilege; everything precious on earth is fragile, rare, and doomed to an uncertain fate. It is true also in our conscience. So, as we preserve and discover new islands of certainties, we should also be aware that we sail in an ocean of uncertainty.

For vulnerable children, the culture of the host country offers a great opportunity for improvement through education and learning, both in traditional school settings and in non-formal educational contexts. These opportunities are provided by public and private educational agencies for unaccompanied migrant children, which we have extensively dealt with in order to present some effective methods of action—also used in residential facilities for UMC—which are crucial to planning the processes of learning knowledge, abilities, and life skills, within the framework of a programme that involves the community.

Among the rights and duties of children in Italy, as well as in other EU Member States, is the fundamental right to education. In Italy, all minors have the right/duty to be educated and trained for at least 12 years or, in any case, until they attain a three-year vocational qualification by the age of eighteen, in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 53 of 2003 [8]; this also applies to UMCA. Law No. 92/2012 on labour market reform for the first time provided a formal definition of the concept of lifelong learning, also emphasising the importance of non-formal education: 'lifelong learning means any activity undertaken by people in a formal, non-formal, and informal way, at different stages of life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competences in a personal, civil, social, and occupational perspective'.

Cajola and Domenici (2005) [9] argue that:

> Today's society is very complex. The role, purpose, and value that each country recognises in and ascribes to its education system vary in accordance with the changing social, cultural, political, and production structure and processes in that country. At all levels of education, there are many criticalities and uncertainties about today's reality: all students lack adequate resources to get to know it and play an active role in it, not least because the knowledge gained from education, however solid and in-depth it may be, no longer seems adequate for them to grow into women and men who are citizens of their own world, hence the need for lifelong learning. The new concept of lifelong learning, which draws on non-formal learning, is all the more crucial because it does not challenge the role of schools, as many mistakenly believe. On the contrary, it is the first step towards understanding the growing complexity of the world and countering the sense of uncertainty that it generates, and towards acquiring a body of knowledge that enables one to look at facts in the right perspective and critically process the flow and flood of information one is exposed to [9], (pp. 155–156)

The education system and the educating community—by means also of non-formal education—are the best foundations for the inclusion of UMC. The State, supported by volunteer associations, undertakes to secure fair and appropriate school inclusion for them, with a view to their social, cultural, and educational integration.

By also relying on non-formal education, the new EU Strategy suggests a set of targeted actions, grouped into six thematic areas: participation of boys and girls in political and democratic life; socio-economic inclusion, health, and education; combating violence against children and protecting minors; child-friendly justice; the digital environment and

information society; and the global dimension. Each of these pillars sets priorities for EU actions in the years to come and will be supported by mainstreaming children's rights more strongly. The EU guidelines have been laid down in the by-laws of non-profit organisations committed to the humanitarian and material assistance of UMC; moreover, in Italy, these guidelines have been incorporated into Law 47/2017.

As highlighted by the analysis of the interview answers from the four groups, it was possible to achieve some positive outcomes (compared to the initial situation of beneficiaries) from extracurricular non-formal learning. At present, non-formal learning schemes interoperate effectively and in synergy with the formal education system. In Italy, for instance, the "Danilo Dolci" Centre for Creative Development implemented a project called "Non-formal Learning in Action: Towards Democracy and Social Inclusion" (2010) [10], funded by the European Youth Foundation. This foundation was established by the Council of Europe to support European youth initiatives. It aims to promote the exchange of transnational good practices in the field of Non-Formal Education (NFE) for youth, as it considers NFE as a crucial complementary educational provision. A handbook was produced to explore and test the viability of this method.

In this regard, for many years, I have been following the technical and practical evolution of NFE schemes throughout the country, on the basis of European manuals (such as Compass [11] and Compasito [12]) that deal with education on citizenship and the Constitution, and human rights education in schools and universities (educational guidance).

The acknowledgement of the role of non-formal learning was reflected in the adoption in 2010 of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education by the member States of the Council of Europe, which provides guidelines and recommendations on how to promote this form of education.

According to American educationalist Kolb, experience as a source of effective learning and development—which distinguishes non-formal education—takes place through a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation (Kolb, 1984) [13]. He understands learning as an integrated process in which each stage supports others and feeds into the next; no stage in the cycle can be effective as a learning process on its own. The process of going through the cycle results in the formation of increasingly complex and abstract 'mental models' of what the learner is learning. Therefore, "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, page 38).

As Kolb explained, he did not create a theory of learning based on experience but discovered it in the writings of a number of authors: John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, William James, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers, and Mary Parker Follett.

Through experience, also citizenship education—which is strongly inclusive—aims to be transformative and to build knowledge, skills, values, and behaviours capable of yielding and triggering, in turn, the ability to understand phenomena in a global and interconnected manner and, ultimately, the ability to make a change.

I had the opportunity to observe and teach "in situation" non-formal learning activities, which were also carried out in several out-of-school contexts like second-level reception facilities, in which the well-being of the person is also taken care of, according to age.

Non-formal education can be epitomised by the phrase 'learning by doing', i.e., learning directly in the field. The learning methodology consists of learners interacting with the practical situations they experience. The educator or facilitator may play a more or less active role in shaping the learning experience by using such methodologies as 'peer tutoring', work projects, mobility projects, etc., in which learners are at the centre of their own learning process, and adults play a supporting role.

Sector associations implement multiple citizenship and human rights education initiatives that include training sessions for the dissemination of the educational activities carried out for the youth, both in schools of all grades and in sports, leisure, and cultural associations that work with fragile minors to enable them to become agents of change and transformative actors for a living and active educating community.

(b)   **The survey semi-structured interviews: creating communities to innovate and organise the reception of unaccompanied migrant children**

The interview format consisted of asking the selected professionals and practitioners some specific questions about their involvement in an inclusion project carried out in the last five years with and for unaccompanied migrant children.

The interview was administered to thirty people who were chosen and selected by their institutions. The respondents, at our written request, represented the following target groups: lawmakers and experts on minors, officers from child and teenager protection authorities, rescue workers, initial reception staff and recognition officers, school leaders and/or coordinators, inclusion and assistant teachers, educators, managers of inclusive sports associations and entities dealing with unaccompanied minors, voluntary and professional tutors, and others.

All the selected respondents gave their informed consent. The interview comprised ten questions: some aimed at learning about the professional, community, and organisational aspects of the respondents' work with unaccompanied minors; other questions aimed at briefly describing the phases of a socio-educational project involving the use of non-formal education that they had carried out over the last five years. The purpose was to involve the staff working with unaccompanied minors in school and out-of-school settings by collecting from them and letting them highlight—each according to his/her own professional expertise—the underlying motivations of such a meaningful piece of experience as non-formal education aimed at fulfilling the life plans of unaccompanied minors.

These interviews were administered in order to single out the value indicators for the inclusion and integration of UMC related to the skills, knowledge, and competencies included in each of the questions asked.

Of paramount importance was the identification of new indicators for training and work; tools used to detect the transfer of acquired learning/behaviours; follow-up measures or actions sometime after the end of the educational project; possible development of good practices; improvement of available resources (whether financial, human, technological, logistical, or others); and improvement of the organisation's internal atmosphere (relations, communication between teachers, school staff and school leaders, conflict resolution, level of cooperation, intra- and inter-institutional dialogue, etc.). At the end of the interview, three keywords were asked about this experience and, more specifically, about the socio-educational approach used to integrate unaccompanied foreign children. In addition, respondents were asked if there were any priorities, and each of them mentioned the most important priorities to achieve real intercultural integration in upper secondary schools, reception facilities, foster homes, and so on.

The semi-structured survey design offers a number of advantages: it allows you to tailor your interviews, it provides more information, and the open-ended questions enable you to obtain more specific and distinctive information about respondents. The interviews took the form of conversations in which both the questions and the topics came up naturally through my experience and careful preparation for the sessions, thanks to the interaction with respondents.

The interviews had some disadvantages; in some cases, they took longer because they did not follow a fixed schedule, but the course of the conversation could take longer than in a structured interview. There could have been a risk of omitting some questions, as there is no obligation to ask all respondents the same questions. This could have affected the objective and unbiased evaluation, so I tried to limit these issues.

In the general educational approach, semi-structured interviews were also used—whenever possible—to investigate views, values, beliefs, opinions, and aspects of culture that are not easily explored through observation. Furthermore, in the case of the integration of unaccompanied Ukrainian children, it was useful to obtain information about the actions that had already been observed, both to understand them better and to discover the reasons that encouraged them.

To gain a better understanding of reception facilities—i.e., the educational communities where UMCs are placed –, more than thirty interviews had to be collected: "by means of face-to-face, conversational interviews, it was possible to conduct an in-depth analysis and collect a wealth of data on respondents' experiences, opinions, attitudes, and expectations" [14] (Benvenuto, 2015, p. 218).

The interview outline consisted of asking the selected professionals and practitioners some specific questions about their involvement in an inclusion project carried out in the last five years with and for unaccompanied migrant children.

The respondents were the person in charge of the Children Supervisory Authority of a town in Lazio, the Deputy Chief of Police of a big city, the President of a migration Museum in Italy, the coordinator of an amateur football school, the coordinator of a migrant sea rescue association, and other people from third sector associations in Lazio. In addition, the following respondents were involved: teachers/professors (2), educators (10), educational coordinators of SAIs (networks of entities that provide reception and integration services for migrants) (2), other coordinators of UMC facilities (2), linguistic and intercultural mediators (2), social workers (3), lawyers (1), school leaders of all grades (2), and teachers of CPIAs (provincial adult education establishments) from within and outside UMC facilities located in Italy (1).

The purpose of the interviews was to gather effective and realistic testimonies on the reception and inclusion process in place for unaccompanied migrant children as they arrived in Europe and Italy. The fieldwork yielded data and conclusions that can be cross-checked and generalised, as well as numerous testimonies on basic inclusion concepts and several effective operational tools.

The mixed quantitative-qualitative approach and analysis made it possible to probe in a more flexible manner the multitude of "voices" that typify UMC as a phenomenon and to compare reception and integration methods for the harmonious development of the personality of a boy or girl who has suffered such a tragic separation from his or her land and family.

Experts's views and testimonies were particularly significant.

There are several extremely active and well-structured organisations that deal with unaccompanied minor children in Italy: 'UNICEF' [15], 'Save the Children' [16] (a network of national humanitarian associations under the International Save the Children Alliance), with its 26 focal points established in recent years in sensitive regions. An important initiative for the future of UMC is "Never Alone, per un domani possibile" (Corradini and Mari, 2019) [17], implemented in 16 regions across Italy to foster migrant children's autonomy and inclusion by safeguarding the full respect of minors' rights, with the purpose of building a new culture of reception. Organisations such as "Fondazione ISMU" [18], "Obiettivo Fanciullo—ODV" [19], "Centro Astalli" [20], and "Opera Nazionale per le Città dei Ragazzi" [21] are strongly committed, in their various capacities, to working with and for UMC and have been involved in the research.

(c)   **The focus group with volunteer tutors of Associazione Obiettivo Fanciullo ODV**

In Italy, volunteer tutors have gained considerable importance in supporting the inclusion of unaccompanied minor children pursuant to Article 11 of Law 47/2017. The research study has also focused on the evolution of their practice in support of Italian institutions. In the last three years, I have followed their operational work with institutions, either online or in presence.

One of the highlights of this research was a focus group with volunteer tutors, in which

> [...] the meaning of the focus group, prompted by proper research questions and moderated by experts, was to encourage individual participants to express, structure and, above all, discuss their thoughts and arguments in an ideological and constructive manner and to elaborate on them thoughtfully. In this regard, the focus group technique is a tool for research data construction rather than for

mere data collection. Hence, the focus group interviewer or moderator's role is critical to the effective and valuable use of this technique [1] (p. 229)

The meeting took place on 16 October 2023 on Microsoft Teams, with 12 volunteer tutors from five regions: Lombardy (1), Lazio/Molise (9), Basilicata (1), and Sicily (2). Many of them were contacted through an association called Obiettivo Fanciullo ODV, which was set up to coordinate and support the efforts of volunteer tutors in Italy. Snowball sampling was used, whereby participants who had already been contacted used their social networks to direct the interviewer to other people who might have been willing to participate or be involved in the study.

The four questions that respondents were asked are reported below.

Introduction: Can you briefly introduce yourself? Can you give a keyword to describe your role?

1.　Based on your experience as a tutor and mentor, accompanying these young people in their social and educational integration, what do you think of the integration processes put in place for these young people? Do you consider them decisive and effective for these kids? What do you think the children you are tutoring need?
2.　I do not want to ask you about the legal aspects of your role with UMC, but what activities do you consider important to facilitate the relationships these children should build with adults and peers outside their home life, i.e., in public and social life?

　- Can you tell us about these?

3.　Let us try to better understand your role in supporting the complex process of identity building among these young migrants. In your opinion, how could the critical aspects of this process be overcome in order to strengthen UMC's language and vocational skills, while making the most of their previous educational experiences?
4.　We are approaching the end: is there anything you would like to add? Is there anything else you would like to say, for instance, about non-formal and informal educational activities that could promote the identity development and integration of these children?

3. Results

In terms of quantitative data, according to the six-monthly in-depth report by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies [22], on 29 February 2024 there were 21,402 unaccompanied migrant children registered in Italy. A comparison of the data shows that the percentage of unaccompanied migrant boys (88.04%) is higher than that of girls (11.96%), who can hardly reach Italy because of adverse travel conditions, vulnerability, and human trafficking.

To collect qualitative data, it was also necessary to understand the life stories of unaccompanied migrant minors through the observation carried out by a team of practitioners over a period of about three years at second-level reception facilities in the Lazio region, Italy.

The results obtained from face-to-face and online meetings and the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data have been very useful in understanding the needs of UMC in Italy.

Unaccompanied boys and girls aged between 15 and 17, upon their arrival and after the recognition procedures and placement into a residential housing unit, are introduced to the learning of Italian and admitted either to schools or to CPIA [23] evening classes, depending on their age and qualifications. The main objective of UMC is to learn Italian in order to obtain a qualification that enables them to enter the labour market.

The following is a summary of the results of the three main phases of the research work, which was carried out with the aim of listening to and understanding the opinions of practitioners, professionals, and teachers who, in their various capacities, work with unaccompanied minors.

a.　Non-formal education and learning processes for UMC in a school context

On the operational side, in response to the requests for new practices aimed at the inclusion of UMC, here is a short analysis of the positive outcomes that have been reported

by educators and social workers regarding the educational experience undertaken by minors in the facilities. In certain culturally disadvantaged situations, it fostered the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and basic competencies, including life skills, and a fair degree of autonomy upon coming of age.

In the educational field, the survey has highlighted how important and yet challenging educators, facilitators, and teachers' roles are.

The school leaders and teachers interviewed expressed some advantages of non-formal education in an inclusive context:

> "Pupils' curricula have also included non-formal education activities, aimed at fostering a positive way of being and acting, a peaceful environment that accepts others, differences and exchange" (interview: teacher).

> "At school, there was a positive feeling, a feeling of pride in being able to give and do our part as well; each one with his/her own competence—such as the laboratory technician, the school helper, teachers, pupils—enthusiastically ready to lend a hand to those children who had war in their eyes" (interview: headmaster).

> "I was very happy to support this project. For the first time, the night school people had stepped out of the classrooms and gone to the seafront, to the beach, to walk, to mix with other like-minded people, to interact with swimming, sailing, windsurfing, trekking and yoga instructors" (interview: teacher).

> "Both in the planning phase and during the educational activities, we take very much into account that these children come from situations of suffering and marginalisation. Therefore, it is precisely the educational environment and organisation, with the participation of social workers too, that allow the level of cooperation between pupils to increase" (interview: teacher).

The analysis of the answers to the question concerning the achievement and development of good practice after the social and educational activities carried out by practitioners/teachers provided a close look at the real situation in the reception system: the necessary knowledge of migration issues, the programming of effective activities to be replicated, the use of new technologies, the inter-school project and strong focus on the newly arrived in Italy (NAI), cultural enrichment, the development of a sense of belonging to the country of arrival, the search for social and educational teaching strategies, socialisation with local inhabitants, a reception protocol, dialogue, inclusion, social sports, fundraising/economic support.

The idea of education as a calling and task of civilisation often stands out, as Nosengo (2014) [24] wrote when he urged teachers and educators not to be goodists with learners but to feel the full responsibility of educating them, not to be indifferent to their problems. This leads to the still urgent and topical need to awaken the inner souls of young people through cultural animation, active teaching, and the experience of social and community life, as we read in his book: "La persona umana e l'educazione" [25], (p. 69).

> [. . .] At the same time, also young people feel the need to be educated and trained in order to gain skills for a culture of democracy that fits in with work ethics and mobilises "values, attitudes, aptitudes, knowledge (...) to respond appropriately and effectively to the needs, challenges, and opportunities that exist in democratic settings".

> The qualitative data collected on unaccompanied migrant children emphasise that they have their own aspirations and goals, according to their roots and prospects, and require to be placed in facilities suited to their needs. Thus, citizenship education goes beyond the school context from which it undoubtedly originates and gets fortified, and touches on other areas of personal, social, and professional responsibility. This clarifies the generative and complementary link that exists between the lifelong learning key competencies and life skills, a link of continuous crossbreeding and cross-referencing [25] (p. 81).

With the outbreak of war in Ukraine, also Italian educational establishments have taken in Ukrainian minors fleeing the conflict, guaranteeing every day "the right/duty to the education of all minors residing in the host country permanently or temporarily, whatever their nationality and place of birth is and at whatever time of the year the inclusion occurs". Under Article 2 of Directive 2001/55/CE [26], the European Union has decided to provide temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees; this is "a procedure of exceptional character to provide, in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin, immediate and temporary protection to such persons".

On 14 April 2022, the Ministry of Education issued its Note No. 781 [27], "Operational directions for admission to the school of Ukrainian students", which states: "There are currently 91,137 people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine who have arrived in Italy, including 33,796 minors. The daily surveys carried out by this ministry report, as of today, 17,657 Ukrainian pupils have been admitted to schools in our national education system. Of these, 3728 children in kindergarten, 8196 in primary school, 4203 in lower secondary school, and 1530 in upper secondary school". Since 24 February 2022, families, women with children, and separated minors who fled the (unfortunately still ongoing) war have been hosted in the Municipality of Lazio.

This situation led to the project called "Le radici del tuo futuro" (Translator's Note: "The roots of your future") launched in the 2021/2022 school year at the upper secondary school, with the inclusion of a number of Ukrainian pupils newly arrived in Italy (NAI).

The experience was analysed in co-authorship with a school leader in Lazio as a case study published in the Eighteenth IDOS report [27] (pp. 100–104), by highlighting the consequences of the war in Europe on the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Italy, particularly in Lazio. The situational observation, the collection and reading of statistical data, and an analysis of the impact of the war on unaccompanied minors made it possible to identify future good practices and outline guidelines for the replanning of minors' lives without erasing the road already travelled. The main objective of the whole project was to provide an opportunity for educational inclusion suited to the level of schooling reached in their country of origin. After the first period of social inclusion—which was necessary to solve health and housing issues—efforts were made to foster minors' learning, to help them grow up in a dignified manner in civil society and the labour market, while also reassuring them from the fears and tragic events they had experienced before and during their escape.

In this framework, the research sought to explain the complex causal connections between all the elements previously considered, including the use of non-formal education techniques to facilitate extracurricular learning.

The educational activities were greatly supported and boosted, in terms of quality and effectiveness, by the new technologies that turned unaccompanied minors into active players in the learning process; the multiple forms of communication offered helped them respond to specific difficulties due to the vulnerability of their initial condition.

The starting analysis focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the reception system put in place upon arrival of the Ukrainian refugees: on the one hand, institutions were capable of responding to the emergency quickly by setting up a well-structured solidarity network based on targeted actions; on the other hand, they adapted existing procedures and promoted new reception procedures.

Right from the arrival of the Ukrainian youths, in order to outline their future independent life prospects, the peer tutoring mode was preferred, also by virtue of the presence of other Ukrainian students who were ready to help their compatriots, who accurately translated their classes, helping them with their homework, and in interpreting cultural implications that, if misinterpreted, could have resulted in misunderstandings and disruptions to intercultural dialogue.

The most obvious difficulty was learning Italian in a short time. Failing the help of a cultural mediator, the so-called 'buddy resource' was mobilised, which was also available outside the school premises; this resource fostered a positive atmosphere and the

involvement of all students. To this end, the sensitivity and support of teachers, in their capacity as facilitators, were crucial.

Through cooperative learning, Ukrainian pupils gained valuable knowledge and skills for their integration; they were also supported by simultaneous interpreters and could use free PCs and tablets for classroom work while remaining in contact with their schools in Ukraine.

The teaching work was arranged in an engaging manner by making the learning environment familiar and providing teaching material translated into English and Ukrainian, with some time devoted to listening to the stories of pupils as direct witnesses of the war. The young learners proved their ability to adapt to the new situation and context with the help of smartphone language applications.

Active listening made it possible to grasp their world, passions, and attitudes, and their texts were full of cultural references and emotions.

The school created a network of connections in the city of Lazio so that in the summer, migrant pupils were introduced into job-like contexts, such as internships or apprenticeships, related to their educational programme, so that they could be integrated into the city and social fabric, thereby achieving their own personal and linguistic self-reliance.

Gatherings and parties were also arranged, and a charitable event for refugee pupils was organised at Christmas time.

At present, the pupils have returned to their hometowns. The educating community is left with the awareness of having experienced an important and significant period, as can be inferred from the testimonies collected in local newspaper articles.

The interviews administered to the school leader and some of the teachers from the participating classes (interview: group 1) have provided valuable information on the organisational work as well as on the intense experience of emotions (Cabello, Álvarez-Mañas, Vigo. & Fernández-Berrocal, 2024) [28] and actions aimed at overcoming the moments of dismay and helplessness in the face of the ongoing war.

The demand for specific vocational training for all the school staff sounds well-grounded so that they can respond to the issues of cultural complexity and multilingualism, which are challenging assets requiring specific training and new skills.

A few meaningful documents can be found on the school portal, bearing witness to the considerable work that has been done. Please refer to the in-depth study: "Le radici del tuo futuro. Minori non accompagnati: dalla Ucraina in guerra alla inclusione scolastica italiana, sognando la pace" (Bernard, Fierli, 2023) [29].

b.   Results of the semi-structured interviews

Here are some answers to the question:—What tools do you use to measure the learning transfer and behaviour developed by unaccompanied migrant children after your social and educational action?

> "After giving them an Italian course in the facility, they attend State schools."
> [. . .] "Loving acts: hugging them, reassuring them, familiarizing with them. For instance, eating together and sharing their daily routines" (interview: mediator).

> "[. . .] is a model that integrates you into society without fear, because it makes you feel like others through listening, dialogue, self-governance, which enable you to achieve awareness and security" (interview: educator).

Various studies, as well as committed humanitarian organisations, specialised associations, and Italian educational institutions, have focused their attention on educational guidance, one of the key processes in choosing a learning or life pathway, designed around UMC's motivations and future expectations.

Due to the target groups and people involved in the different activities, this research study also collected data and good practices to enhance projects on the integration and inclusion of refugee and migrant minors in Europe, including at school.

The Director of the Migration Museum in Italy first set the tone with a slogan: "The future has ancient roots" and then listed three keywords to start from for the non-formal education of young people: curiosity, interest, and the future.

The person in charge of the Children Supervisory Authority in a town in Lazio pointed to the integration of UMC as an asset for society:

"The first way to plan integration activities is to get to know the life stories of unaccompanied migrant children to implement educational inclusion activities for migrants in a municipality in Lazio. The goal is to learn more about their habits, beliefs, and ways of living so that they can integrate and, most importantly, so that these lonely boys and girls, as they grow up, can learn some basic vocational skills in trades that are disappearing; for example, working side by side with master craftsmen in workshops, or with shipwrights or in other types of jobs in farming or tourism".

The Deputy Chief of Police—formerly (for fifteen years) Head of the Immigration Office, where the handling of unaccompanied migrant minors was strictly regulated—stated that:

"[...] Several professionals were involved in the growth of these children's personalities until they came of age; to support each child, there was a social worker, an educational team, a guardian appointed by the Juvenile Court. According to government statistics, thanks to the existing reception system in Italy, many of them have grown to adulthood and have become integrated into the national context; many of them attended school and obtained a school-leaving certificate; others entered the labour market and were employed in a sector suited to their aptitudes.

This initiative offered a great chance to learn more about the varied world of voluntary organisations and the third sector, which generates a positive social impact on the community". The interviews aimed to investigate how the quantitative needs of the beneficiaries entrusted to professionals can be combined with the actual skills of the latter, who are sometimes compelled to deal with problems for which they do not possess adequate vocational skills. In this framework—which needs some readjustment in the light of the data analysed—a strong help and boost towards greater quality and effectiveness of the core actions comes from the new technologies that make it possible to bring UMC closer to knowledge, by using tools that render them key actors in the learning process.

c.   Results of the focus group with the volunteer tutors of Associazione Obiettivo Fanciullo ODV

The opening question of the interview to the tutors was a brief presentation of their role and a keyword to represent it. The answers were commitment, support to integration, adaptability, mentoring, peculiarity, acceptance of the other, determination, love and attention, bridging, involvement, research, and security.

The other questions investigated the positive and critical aspects of the UMC integration process. According to tutors, having children attend educational institutions in order to obtain valid qualifications remains a priority, although integration is still important, without denying their cultural identity, which, in turn, should be an element of research, consideration, and enhancement. They recommend vocational training in crafts and professions that are more sought-after among young people: carpenters, plumbers, or electricians. Strong emphasis has been placed on the need to select tutor applicants more carefully by assessing their personalities and openness to the social context. Attention should also be paid to the selection of professionals who assist minors. Moreover, tutors would like to improve their training in view of a forthcoming educational project with the help of intercultural educationalists and educators who would provide them with practical elements for constructive interaction with UMC.

According to many tutors, the most serious problem lies in the too short time available for integration—in legal, bureaucratic, and inclusion terms—of young people who arrive in Italy nearly at the age of the majority. The long time it takes to obtain the necessary documents is to be added to the time required to train the various practitioners who assist migrant minors—from educators to trainers and reception facility personnel – who are not

always adequately skilled to deliver a suitable vocational and social integration programme. Even the number of social workers is not sufficient—especially in large cities—to provide the necessary care for all minors. By contrast, in small cities and towns, the level of expertise and commitment towards foreign minors is significantly more active and engaged: they are supported with individualised life projects and training schemes, as well as effective integration in education, sports, and leisure. Among the priorities, tutors pointed out the need to provide training for youngsters, not only for educational purposes but also to address all the bureaucratic formalities required for their inclusion and integration with the local inhabitants. This is possible through cultural and sports activities and by paying attention to the social and sociological implications of interacting with Italian peers because unaccompanied migrant minors seek social interaction and exchange with their peers to grow.

4. Discussion and Considerations

All the respondents in the four groups mentioned the following keywords in their socio-educational activities for UMC: integration, acceptance, and inclusion, followed by communication—necessary for any social and educational action—along with friendship and humaneness.

At the end of the interviews with the educators involved in the research, it was possible to summarise the positive and negative aspects of inclusion education as an approach that goes beyond the time frame and boundaries of the school setting and is explicitly tailored to the needs and requirements of unaccompanied migrant children in relation to the whole process of their growth and integration into society.

As a final overview, the positive and negative aspects are reported below.

- In the field of education and training, the following negative aspects were identified: lack of resources, little time to organise the training programme, unavailability of specialised professionals, poor training in the field of child integration, and too many temporary facilities in which minors find it difficult to integrate.
- The positive aspects include the use of volunteer tutors, adequate state-funded facilities (SAIs-NGOs), the acquisition of Italian qualifications, optimisation of time, networking opportunities, a reception system that promotes maturity and integration, suitable accommodation solutions for the training process, and continuous dialogue and information.
- At the operational level, the negative aspects identified are poor listening by public services, lack of information on bureaucratic aspects, long delays in bureaucratic procedures, difficulties in obtaining documents, lack of cultural and psychological mediators, young people being asked to leave the institutions at the age of 18 without any protection, and difficulties in finding accommodation.
- From an operational point of view, some of the positive aspects are Law 47/2017, which guarantees the presence of tutors for UMC until the age of 21; vocational training and the possibility of a legal employment contract; the appointment of a professional tutor at the age of 18; the development of valuable projects for UMC through an efficient network of associations; and cooperation and participation.

The uniqueness of this research also stems from the analysis of the data collected in the field by listening closely to the opinions of practitioners and experts who have not always been involved and engaged in previous research studies. Instead, in this research, they provided a detailed picture of the different approaches to managing UMC. Increased use of family fostering is recommended; this solution is preferable to institutionalisation. The volunteer tutors were key professionals. UMC should be encouraged to engage in educational and social integration programmes in order to reshape their life plans.

The research phases aimed to measure the positive or negative impact of their progress, in line with the 'EU Action Plan on Unaccompanied Children (2010–2014)' adopted by the European Commission in 2010, with a view to finding lasting solutions for unaccompanied

migrant children and supporting their social integration. The protection of migrant minors focuses on early integration and support during the transition from care to adulthood.

There was positive feedback on the actual promotion of learning through Non-Formal Education (NFE) and leisure activities for pupils, also with a view to learning innovative approaches to inclusion and effective learning. Such activities took place in groups. On such occasions, educators and teachers develop quality teaching methods; the responses are positive and centred on two fundamental cornerstones: effectiveness and values. The keywords highlight that the issue of UMC should be addressed through a holistic and inclusive approach. Focusing on personal growth, education, and integration into the social and labour fabric of the host country is crucial. Many answers clearly highlight the importance of providing opportunities and chances for self-determination and future planning. Finally, curiosity and interest in the culture and history of the host country as well as the prospect of a better future, are key elements for the success of these efforts.

In conclusion, a social and educational approach is needed for unaccompanied minor children, even those who consider Italy to be a transit country. The data collected highlight the importance of educational practices, new workshop methodologies, and new digital media also to implement viable and effective modes of assistance in residential facilities for UMC, which are useful both to promote anti-racism in the host country and to improve the work with and inclusion of young migrants.

The focus group technique has made It possible to analyse the complex organisational system that is involved in the management of UMC in order to highlight good educational, teaching, and inclusive practices, which could be shared with similar groups and therefore generalised.

The interviews collected relevant ideas and projects for the autonomy and education of UMC, which can be used to create a toolbox of indicators for the integration of migrant children and teenagers into schools and extracurricular settings, drawing on stakeholders' direct experiences. The idea is to create an approach based on minors' rights, emphasising the importance of cultural instruments in the learning process. Such instruments, developed by society over time, enable us to interact with and understand the world.

Efforts will be further undertaken to develop recommendations on improving social and educational integration policies for unaccompanied migrant children by involving those who work closely with them in the inclusion process. A documentary film was also made in order to disseminate these findings among organisations that work with the youth in Italy and Spain and for policymakers in Europe. The title is "*L'Altrove, la voce del silenzio*" [30]: it is a monologue by an unaccompanied migrant minor travelling from Morocco to Lampedusa (Italy), directed by Giovanni La Rosa. It has already been presented in the universities of Seville, Granada, Malta, and Rome to encourage the launch of non-formal education projects addressing the issue of UMC.

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